



Schooling Never Neutral

Mike Cole's conclusions, given here as the last of three parts to his essay, includes the following paragraph:

"Formal schooling is never socially neutral. Even presumably neutral skill acquisition presumes the value-laden activities they were designed to accomplish, and it is usually accompanied by ideological considerations that exaggerate the actual use value of the knowledge acquired."

Not all of Cole's conclusions are as unambiguous as the one above. For example, the first of his conclusions is:

"Formal schooling arises as part of the division of labor in societies when they reach a certain scale in terms of number of people."

Societies "reach a certain scale" as a consequence of changes in production. Formal schooling is one of those things that are

consequences of change in relations of production. The initial change in the relations of production had to do with the division of society into antagonistic classes. This is something Mike Cole barely hints at.

The corresponding fall of the women from first among equals, to subordinates of men, took place at the same time, but Mike Cole does not mention this. Schooling is gendered, as much as it is “classed”.

At the same time as the division of society into antagonistic classes and the fall of women arrive, so do private property and the law of contract, the State to enforce the law of contract, and writing. This is the beginning of history.

Cole says:

“Formal schooling mediated by print and other sign systems produces age segregation and the institutionalized forms of hierarchy that articulate with the state or ecclesiastical institutions of which they are a part in a variety of ways.”

But schooling does not produce the State. The State is reproduced in the school.

The fact that classrooms universally, and from the time of the Sumerians, are laid out in the spreadsheet (and military) form of rows and columns, is not an accident. It “articulates with the State”. The medium is the message.

A Pedagogy of the Oppressed requires a dialogue format, or what is called a “boardroom”, as opposed to a “classroom”, or “theatre”.

Having missed so many things, or deliberately omitted them, Cole proceeds to problematise “enculturation” as something outside of or parallel to the formal schooling system, that requires to be brought back in, or to be managed in some other way.

One can easily understand the narrowness of the schooling that Cole describes. But whether what he calls “nature’s multicolored, multicultural, enormously heterogeneous forms” can be added on, is questionable. On the contrary, what is more clearly required is a return to humanism, where humanism is not corrupted by class struggle. This would be a true Pedagogy of the Oppressed. It would be a Pedagogy of Revolution.

The attached text includes the references relating to the other two parts of the full essay that have already been given.

The next item is one of Andy Blunden’s writings about Hegel, where we may discover the beginnings of a more humanistic way of reclaiming education for the oppressed.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Cole, Perspectives, Part 3, Way Forward, 2005.](#)
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